

Voicing the Voiceless Through Theatre

**An Exploration of How the Diverse Theatrical Devices Highlight
the Societal Issues Expressed in Pat Kinevane's *Silent and
Forgotten.***

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Introduction

Pat Kinevane is an actor and playwright from Cork, notable for his solo performances in his one-man shows *Forgotten* and *Silent*. The two plays emerge from within a trilogy, which also includes his third show, *Underneath*. Director of the trilogy, Jim Culleton says about Kinevane:

“From the start of his playwriting, he displayed a fearlessness and bravery in dealing with taboo subjects and wrote with a great sense of passion. His work as an actor also informed these early plays which, as well as displaying great characterisation, had a sense of theatricality bursting from them.”¹

The trilogy shares theatrical elements such as physical theatre, mime, Kinevane’s switching between character and gender, and audience interaction. Dance and movement are used as a mode of character expression rather than relying on words to communicate. Generally, there is aesthetic emphasis placed on what can be seen in the plays rather than what can be heard.

The characters Kinevane portrays in the plays are figures who are marginalized in Irish society. *Forgotten* touches on the discrimination against elderly people, *Silent* looks at the homelessness crisis, and *Underneath* tells the story of ‘Her’, a young woman who experienced intolerance due to her facial disfigurement. While the plays seem heavy in subject matter, they take on a contrasting lightness in humour, which is prevalent throughout.

Kinevane switches between the two states often and unexpectedly.

Emotionally, he can turn on a dime onstage – going from laughter to the brink of tears, and back again. It’s all part of his way of ensuring he brings real people to the stage. “I think it’s more to do with the way I see the characters, that they’re fleshed out to the full and that an audience gets to know the characters even in the hour and a half”²

¹ Kinevane, Pat. *Forgotten/Silent*. (Methuen Drama, 2011), “Director’s Note”.

² Barry, Aoife. “Pat Kinevane: ‘We can be terribly cruel - so that drives me to try and make some sense of people’”, thejournal.ie, <https://www.thejournal.ie/pat-kinevane-interview-3335190-Apr2017/> [Accessed 29th April 2019].

Forgotten centres on the lives of four characters whose ages range from eighty to one-hundred, all living in different nursing homes. The issues concerning the elderly that the play tackles show the characters Kinevane represents as isolated and alone. *Forgotten* displays a variety of performance skills by Kinevane, including his ability to transform from one character to the next, and convince the audience that he has changed himself into a new person. As well as this, from the influence of cultural rituals originating from Japan, Kinevane performs his own version of Kabuki dance.

Where *Forgotten* provides a voice for elderly people, *Silent* gives its audience a first-hand view into the life of a homeless person. The play looks at problematic societal topics such as homelessness, mental health and suicide and illuminates the silence which surrounds these themes. Simultaneously, it makes distinguishable links with the genre of silent film and looks at the silent film star Rudolph Valentino.

Kinevane's work obtains a uniqueness with his blending of various theatrical forms in one show. This seemingly sets him apart from any other playwrights' work within the genre of contemporary Irish theatre. The use of the plays' international influential theatrical styles such as Kabuki and Hollywood silent film defies what Irish theatre is typically known for. Irish theatre is usually celebrated for its deep appreciation for words and speech in plays. Consequently, the actor's body is often excluded with the emphasis that is placed on mostly verbal aspects of theatre. *Performing the Body in Irish Theatre* expresses such tendencies in Irish theatre;

“Brilliance in the theatre has, for Irish dramatists, been linguistic. Formally, the Irish theatrical tradition has not been highly experimental. It depends almost exclusively on talk, on language left to itself to run through the whole spectrum of a series of personalities often adapted the same individual”

(Deane in Friel 1987: 12)³

³ Sweeney, Bernadette. *Performing the Body in Irish Theatre* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1.

Having always considered himself a physical actor, Kinevane creates his pieces of theatre from this perspective. Jim Culleton states that;

Pat is very influenced by the fact that 80/90% of what we take in the world is what we see, and the rest of it is what we hear. So even though he loves words, he also loves images and movement and is very interested in dance and how dance can be used in theatre.⁴

Furthermore, the style of the plays echo Peter Brook's Rough Theatre;

The popular theatre, freed of unity of style, actually speaks a very sophisticated and stylish language: a popular audience usually has no difficulty in accepting inconsistencies of accent and dress, or in darting between mime and dialogue, realism and suggestion.⁵

Like Brook's description of Rough Theatre, Kinevane's use of minimal props, costume and set design work to portray a wider landscape. The idea of his performances speaking a "sophisticated and stylish language" is true in a paradoxical sense because his characters speak in the vernacular while also moving/dancing in an elegant manner, further pushing the differences between the local and the international. For example, the character of Flor in *Forgotten* uses language which is written specific to how he says the words; "The grey mare at the post office I used to cash me book at. Oul silver capall she was, wouldn't get a kick in a horny shtampede!" (*Forgotten/Silent*, 45)

The questions to be asked in terms of Kinevane's work explore the specific ways in which *Forgotten* and *Silent* look at how marginalised people are viewed in Ireland, how the physicality and images in the plays relate to the representations of marginalised people, and where Kinevane's plays fit into the genre contemporary Irish theatre.

⁴ Culleton, Jim. (26th March 2019). Personal interview.

⁵ Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*. (Penguin, 2008), 75.

1. *Forgotten*

Centring on the lives of elderly Irish people, *Forgotten* is structured into monologues.

Through their speeches, we learn about the central characters Flor, Dora, Gustus and Eucharia. The play shows them digging into their past and present, revealing information about themselves and shedding light on their various and deteriorating physical and mental states. It becomes apparent that Flor suffers from Alzheimer's disease, Gustus had a stroke and has lost his ability to speak, and Dora has a reliance on alcohol. Eucharia is arguably the most reliable story-teller.

The monologues begin to link together as the stories progress. Not only is there the connection of Flor and Eucharia both having worked for Dora's family, but there is also the connection involving Eucharia;

...who conceives a child subsequently adopted by the childless Gustus and his wife Georgina. Her child is now the soon-to-be 64-year-old woman whom Eucharia observes selling shoes in Arnott's department store on her weekly 'start-over' trips to Dublin.⁶

Ageing and the Elderly

Focusing on the societal and political subject matter behind *Forgotten*, it draws upon various dubious areas surrounding the older generation in Ireland. Having previously trained as a nurse in a geriatric ward and having a sister who works a great deal with elderly people, Kinevane's research sources came mostly from personal experiences. One thing Kinevane learned from his sister, he says, was "...every person's feelings of growing old are entirely different and they can't all be thrown into the one sort of formula."⁷ This idea is brought into

⁶ Fitzpatrick Dean, Joan. "Pat Kinevane's *Forgotten* and *Silent*: Universalizing the Abject" in *Irish Theatre in Transition*, ed. Donald Morse. (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 210.

⁷ Kinevane, Pat. (27th March 2019). Telephone interview.

the play as each character introduces a new aspect or a different perspective, and the audience are shown four different characters with different outlooks. However, a common issue highlighted is that of loneliness and being forgotten about. While this is something all the characters experience, Flor and Dora stand out immediately as victims of this, as the friends and relatives of both are now deceased.

The nature of Flor's illness means that he shifts frequently from one subject to the next, but the prevailing theme causing these shifts is loneliness. Flor sees apparitions of Holy Mary, who, according to him, keeps him safe, describing her as "My dependable Virgin"⁸. The visions of Mary relate to Flor's failure to find love throughout his life; at one stage, he advertises for his "new novel entitled 'Every nice girl I ever courted left or lurches me.'" (*Forgotten/Silent*, 51). He tells the audience that Mary first appeared to him on the night that his love affair with a "posh fuckin country Madam fuckin Butterfly" (*Forgotten/Silent*, 52) ended, who we later find out was Dora. He says about Mary that she has been "mindin me all the while since." (*Forgotten/Silent*, 52) The apparition registers as a kind of coping mechanism for loneliness.

There are many points in the play where Kinevane emphasizes the idea of the elderly in Ireland as an after-thought, and the lack of dignity one could experience when living in a nursing home. Flor endures moments of frustration whenever his nurse comes to bathe him. "Please give me a bit of privacy and let no one in" (*Forgotten/Silent*, 41). This recurring interference of the nurse happens at various points in the play, but as the conflict endures, Flor's desperation becomes more and more apparent as he ends up pleading for his independence.

⁸ Kinevane, Pat. *Silent/Forgotten*. (Methuen Drama, 2011), 50.

The area of medication and sedation in nursing homes is touched upon in Eucharía's speech when she discusses Hannah Roche, a woman in the same nursing home. According to Eucharía, Hannah is "due to die any day" and "if ye ask me 'tis cos of the lorryload of tablets they shovel into her- cocktails! Demented is Hannah" (*Forgotten/Silent*, 48). Medication is a topical area when it comes to nursing homes in Ireland. According to an Irish Times article, drugs and sedatives are frequently used on patients without initially trying to identify the problem. In the article, after witnessing her father's medical record in his nursing home, Lourda Finn concludes that, "It's easier to dope up patients; then they can sit there like they don't exist."⁹ From what Eucharía tells us, this act is performed on those around her who are perhaps less capable than her, such as Hannah.

One of the theatrical devices involves Flor weaving in and out of television sketches. At one stage he is interviewed by an imaginary Gay Byrne and in another he has his own cookery programme. The sketches portray an edge of satire, but the character also digs into dark issues older people can experience. He comments on euthanasia clinics in Switzerland when he pretends to be a news reader on RTE. He tells the audience about a terminally ill woman who travelled there where she given the opportunity to take her own life in a hospital environment, and as a result, he says she "stopped suffering". Flor expresses awe at such an opportunity; "...isn't she the luckiest lucky lucklady to eshcape this torturous garden of shite-hole." (*Forgotten/Silent*, 35)

Because travelling to Switzerland is too remote from Flor's ability, he takes matters into his own hands. He saved every pill his nurse gave him throughout the play and stored them in his pocket. *Forgotten* ends with him swallowing them all, presumably resulting in his death. He

⁹ O'Brien, Carl. "Old and overmedicated: the drug problem in our nursing homes", *The Irish Times*. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/old-and-overmedicated-the-drug-problem-in-our-nursing-homes-1.2232764> [Accessed 29th April 2019].

leaves the play with the parting words of; “I’m left with fuck all in the end.”

(*Forgotten/Silent*, 53) What Kinevane illustrates in Flor’s ending denotes tragedy. The tragic element of this moment is also heightened due to the sheer sense of humour Flor brings to the play, however, by the end of the play, Flor along with the other characters becomes a notion of the past.

Giving Dignity: The Japanese Aesthetic

Kinevane utilises Japanese influences in *Forgotten* as a kind of theatrical motif, researching specifically into the culture of Japan. The use of this art form acts as a comparison, placing the culture of Ireland next to that of Japan. In doing so, the differences between the two are illuminated when it comes to caring for the elderly. Kinevane states that “Japanese culture emphasises the importance of an adult child’s obligation to care for their aging parents”¹⁰ However, in Ireland, he argues that such an obligation is cast aside, seeing it as a burden; “It’s more of a duty, and an honourable duty from an Eastern point of view. So, I wanted to leave the audience talking about that.”¹¹

As well as cultural norms, the characteristics of Kabuki also seem to put respect for tradition and the older generation at the forefront. As stated in *The Longman Anthology of Drama and Theatre*;

The Japanese, who revere the old (*sabi*), expect Kabuki actors to master centuries-old *kata* (basic movements and vocal patterns that Kabuki actors must learn). Actors are judged not on their originality, but on their ability to raise traditional artistry to new levels and thus achieve *aware*, an appreciation of beauty in the familiar.¹²

¹⁰ *Forgotten/Silent*, Preface.

¹¹ Kinevane, Pat. (27th March 2019). Telephone interview.

¹²L. Greenwald, Michael. *The Longman Anthology of Drama and Theatre*. (Pearson, 2011), 371.

This attention and respect towards the old methods parallels with the treatment of the elderly in Japan. Thus, the use of Kabuki theatre, or at least the idea behind it in *Forgotten* is of such relevance.

The influence of Japan can be seen theatrically through Kinevane's own interpretation of Kabuki dance and use of sound effects and music recognisable as Eastern sounds. Kabuki dates back as far as the 17th Century. It is a style of dance which adopts theatrical traits such as mime, singing and performance of a stylized manner. The style of performance was derived from a female dancer named Okuni. Kabuki allows for women and men to dress as the opposite sex, much like Kinevane's swapping in and out of female and male characters in *Forgotten*; "The plays often featured women dressed as men, men as women."¹³

Joan Fitzpatrick Dean in *Irish Theatre in Transition* discusses the moments in the play where Kabuki is used;

Kinevane suggests that the stylization of Kabuki theatre provided a means to facilitate graceful transitions among the four characters performed in various stage spaces in *Forgotten* and was critical to the preservation of the characters' dignity.¹⁴

Kabuki dance helps to bring the play from one moment to the next and from character to character. It is a stylistic choice which contrasts with the four characters who would otherwise be too frail to dance. The beauty of Japanese culture is depicted through Kinevane's version of Kabuki and works as a constant reminder to the audience of the cultural differences between Ireland and Japan. About the fusion of Kabuki theatre and the elderly characters in *Forgotten*, Kinevane says, "Why not represent these beautiful elderly people – why not represent their movement in a more extendedly beautiful way"¹⁵.

¹³ *The Longman Anthology of Drama and Theatre*, 368.

¹⁴ *Irish Theatre in Transition*, 208.

¹⁵ Kinevane, Pat. (27th March 2019). Telephone interview.

A *mie* is a device within the framework of Kabuki also present in *Forgotten*. *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre* describes the *mie* as a moment in which; “Actors characteristically freeze in tableaux at emotional climaxes, thus intensifying and prolonging moments of dramatic tension.”¹⁶ This freeze is used on three occurrences throughout the play, by Flor, Dora and Eucharia. Dora has the first of the *mie*’s, and it occurs as she remembers a love affair she had with Jonathan Hanvill – “desired by most in the town.” (*Forgotten/Silent*, 44) The *mie* follows Dora’s fragmented memory of a sexual encounter the two shared the night of her twenty-first birthday; “Lent was finished. Touches. Rubbing. Wet mouths. My thigh... My God!” (*Forgotten/Silent*, 44) The *mie* position describes her to have her “*Fist in mouth*” (*Forgotten/Silent*, 44) which melts after a moment. About this specific moment in the play, Kinevane states that;

He follows her to the conservatory, she was willing, it was all consensual. There was a sexual encounter and I suppose to the audience it was them seeing a snapshot of what happened. It was ecstasy, and maybe at the time she tells the story, it’s her way of keeping her ecstasy in. She couldn’t let it out.¹⁷

It is an effective device in portraying this heightened moment in Dora’s past as everything comes to a sudden and unexpected halt.

Gustus is the only character without a *mie*, but arguably, his equivalent to the *mie* is when he relives his daughter’s performance in a talent contest when she was seven years old, dressed up as a Geisha girl and singing a song about “quaint Japan”. In this moment, Gustus “*rises and dances demurely with a fan... dreamlike*” (*Forgotten/Silent*, 46). It is the only moment in the play where Gustus is fully mobile, as due to his stroke, it is stated earlier in the play that “*He can only move his arms henceforth...*” (*Forgotten/Silent*, 36). Thus, it demonstrates a heightened moment for Gustus, like what the *mie* does for the other characters.

¹⁶ Banham, Martin. *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre*. (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 583.

¹⁷ Kinevane, Pat. (27th March 2019). Telephone interview.

This moment is also one of the direct links the play creates to Japan. The contest seems to be Gustus' only fond memory of his daughter. When Gustus re-enacts the song, he stops half-way through to make the comment; "Now dares a crowd. The Japanese. Treat their elder lemons with the utmost respect. See it as their duty." (*Forgotten/Silent*, 46) A contrast is formed because, according to Gustus, his daughter does not care about him in any way, particularly not in his old age.



Pat Kinevane wearing Geisha make-up in *Forgotten*.¹⁸

Eucharia applies make-up during one of her speeches, making herself look like a Geisha. When she does this in the play, she speaks of her biological daughter who was adopted by Gustus. Not only does the Geisha appearance make a link to Japan, but it also links Eucharia to her daughter who she has never known, and regrets giving up. "She never knew who I was. Never will! My Angel." (*Forgotten/Silent*, 53) The use of this theatrical device is subtle in delivering the tie between mother and daughter, and further pushing the notion of the respect for the elderly.

A known characteristic of Kabuki theatre and Kinevane's work combined is that of audience interaction. Kinevane's one-man shows are credited for their in-the-moment noticing of what

¹⁸ Forsgren, Veronica. Eyespyla.blogspot.com <http://eyespyla.blogspot.com/2014/03/not-typical-one-man-show-pat-kinevane.html> [Accessed 29th April 2019].

is happening in the audience, and chatting to selected people, bringing them into the story. “It is all part of the performance, weaving his audience into the stories which he is telling.”¹⁹ In doing this, Kinevane creates a spark of humour and spontaneity in his performances, keeping the audience guessing as he draws them into the story line using this direct method.

Kabuki does this also –

The Kabuki fosters much interplay between actors and audience. A shallow auditorium (less than 60 feet) puts the audience in close proximity to the actors, who perform almost exclusively on the forestage.²⁰

This incorporation of audience interaction in Kabuki theatre was considered one of Okuni’s “boldest innovations”²¹. The idea of performing in a “shallow auditorium” also relates to Kinevane, as his one-man shows are frequently performed in intimate spaces as well as community centres and venues without a stage. With the intimate space and the individual attention Kinevane puts toward each chosen audience member, the interaction obtains a kind of respect. In a review of *Forgotten*, Irina Glinski describes these interactions as “...something that usually produces an immediate and noticeable sitting-up-straight and avoiding of eye contact” which is “done with a warmth and generosity that quickly breeds trust.”²²

The ending sequence of *Forgotten* is one which ties the play up neatly, and yet, it leaves a lingering echo of who the characters were before they were forgotten. Through the movement of Kabuki inspired dance, Kinevane visits the four parts of the stage which represent the four different nursing homes and covers the area with a piece of fabric. The image has a connotation of death with the finality of the gesture obtaining a bitter-sweet note. This

¹⁹ L., Frank. *No More Workhorse*. <https://nomoreworkhorse.com/2017/04/03/forgotten-abbey-theatre-review/> [Accessed 29th April 2019].

²⁰ *The Longman Anthology of Drama and Theatre*, 370.

²¹ *The Longman Anthology of Drama and Theatre*, 368.

²² Glinski, Irina. *The Wee Review*. <https://theweereview.com/review/forgotten/> [Accessed 29th April 2019].

contrasts with the opening image in the play, with Kinevane removing the fabric from each area, with hidden rose petals underneath which were propelled into the air upon the reveal. The rose petals symbolise life and depict the notion of beauty which is hidden beneath the surface. This fits with Kinevane's attraction to the elegance and grace of Kabuki dance, connecting it to the movement of elderly people. "I love the fact that their movement is different," says Kinevane. "I don't think it's worse, I just think it's different. It's a different kind of a grace."²³ In doing so, elegance and beauty is found in the old. Through the connection the play makes between classical Japanese culture and the elderly, the stature of the characters is elevated.

²³ Kinevane, Pat. (27th March 2019). Telephone interview.

2. *Silent*

Tino is a homeless man and the central character of *Silent*, who tells the audience that he was named after silent film star, Rudolph Valentino. In the early 1900s, Valentino depicted an image of physical beauty which relates to how Tino paints his tragic brother, Pearse, who committed suicide due to the harassment he endured around his homosexuality. Tino says about his brother; “he looked like a movie star from way back... soundless, perfect.” (*Forgotten/Silent*, 5) Describing his brother as “soundless” and “perfect” creates an immediate parallel to Valentino and silent films.

During the play, Tino is the main character who Kinevane embodies, but through Tino, female characters such as his mother and his ex-wife are shown. Through the monologue format, the audience learns about Tino as he discusses his life and how he came to be homeless. However, taking once again from the theme of silent films, the play dips into sequences which take us out of the present moment with Tino, depicting the events of Pearse’s four suicide attempts.

Homelessness, Mental Health and Suicide

Various methods of research were undertaken by Kinevane to ensure that a realistic portrayal of a homeless man’s life would be shown. In an interview with Kinevane, he discussed how he would go out to the street himself to talk with homeless people; “I would get down on the footpath and just talk and talk and talk”²⁴. These experiences translate into the play as Tino sits on the ground and lists the different kinds of shoes that he sees; “slingbacks and peeptoos,

²⁴ Kinevane, Pat. (27th March 2019). Telephone interview.

their wedges and Pradas” (*Forgotten/Silent*, 20). Director of *Silent*, Jim Culleton observes how this is usually received by the audience; “People often get very affected by that. You’re suddenly on the ground with him. You’re seeing that he sees the world just up as far as people’s knees.”²⁵

There is also a section of the play in which Tino lists the different support systems which are available to people like him who are homeless and suffer from addiction. Tino says; “I’ve had an army of project workers, promises of detox beds, thirteen-week programmes, links for assessment, group therapy, dual diagnosis, battalions of key workers...” In the end he concludes, “but the fuckin guilt won’t leave me.” (*Forgotten/Silent*, 18).

Mental health is discussed mainly in reference to Tino’s character. The research Kinevane did relates once again to his training as a psychiatric nurse. Kinevane recalls his experience during this period; “I just found the environment and what I was seeing around me wasn’t what I had expected. It was very bleak.”²⁶ The bleakness of what Kinevane witnessed is evident in the language of the play, particularly how Tino talks about the hospitals that he visits; “...there is still mould on the walls – Vision for Change my hole – still the cold empty colourless patients all around me and they abandoned in rank Victorian Buildings...” (*Forgotten/Silent*, 18).

Commenting on mental health is also where the play indulges a biting sense of humour. A recurring moment happens in the play where Tino picks up a white bottle and pretends to be talking on the phone. He puts on a monotone voice for the “Mental Health Hotline!”; “If you are obsessive compulsive, press 1 repeatedly!!” (*Forgotten/Silent*, 5) This tongue-and-cheek approach to mental health is effective in depicting humour which is usually not present around the discussion of mental health. Because mental health issues are a part of Tino’s

²⁵ Culleton, Jim. (26th March 2019). Personal interview.

²⁶ Kinevane, Pat. (27th March 2019). Telephone interview.

world, the humour almost works as a kind of coping mechanism; as if laughing is a way for Tino to deal with his internal conflicts.

One of the ways in which Kinevane breaks the fourth wall is when he directly addresses the audience and asks them if there is anybody willing to admit that they have taken anti-depressants. This moment comes as a surprise to the audience and due to the ever-changing and in the moment nature of audience interaction, some people are willing to put up their hands. However, mostly in this situation, people are hesitant and usually will not. Tino states the reason for this hesitance, which is predicted by Kinevane in the play's script; "Why the fear to admit that? You know why! In case people think you are somehow unhinged, unpredictable, nuts..." (*Forgotten/Silent*, 10) The device is effective in instilling a possible light in the minds of its audience members and creates a space for further pondering and reflection. As expressed in *Irish Theatre in Transition*, *Silent* employs "monologist techniques to establish and then to manipulate the relationship between actor and audience."²⁷

Suicide is discussed in the play in relation to Tino's brother Pearse. Pearse committed suicide a few years before homosexuality was decriminalised in Ireland in 1993. The play contemplates the long-term effects of suicide as we see Tino still battling with a gnawing sense of guilt many years later. The guilt surrounds his feeling that he should have done something for Pearse but didn't. *Silent* shows how, over the years, the guilt Tino feels has manifested itself into feelings of self-loathing and self-hatred; "...when I think of Pearse it cripples me like a veteran and I can't move, can't get better, can't pull myself together" (*Forgotten/Silent*, 18). Tino also says about his mother that she "went into a kind of walking coma after Pearse." (*Forgotten/Silent*, 19).

²⁷ *Irish Theatre in Transition*, 212.

Tino remembers a time when suicide was a word which was not permitted to be spoken; “...when Pearse finally succeeded, the word was nowhere to be heard... and yet, it was there, bursting to escape, behind the front teeth of everybody’s downturned mouth.”

(*Forgotten/Silent*, 12). During two moments in the play, a voice-over of a suicide note is played, with Tino mouthing the words. Because it is known that Pearse committed suicide, it is assumed that the note was from him. As concluded in *Irish Theatre in Transition*, “Only at the end of the play does the audience realize that, like his brother, Tino has taken his own life. The suicide note is his, not Pearse’s; Tino speaks to the audience of *Silent* from beyond the grave.”²⁸ Tino tells the audience how he was; “...shovelled under- beside Pearse. Near him all the time now – and everything is finally glorious – and – Silent.” (*Forgotten/Silent*, 23).

Giving Voice: Silent Film and Dance

The influence of silent film, an art form which favours images rather than speech, is prevalent in the play. As research, Jim Culleton said “we looked at some Valentino films and what he was like and found some ideas for images and moments in the play through that.”²⁹ Four specific moments in *Silent* link directly to silent film, depicting Pearse’s four suicide attempts – during the final attempt, Pearse is successful. In order of appearance, the titles of the film sequences are; ‘THE EAGLE’, ‘ALL NIGHT’, ‘BEYOND THE ROCKS’ and ‘THE WONDERFUL CHANCE’, all named after Rudolph Valentino movies. For each film, a costume piece is taken from a black plastic bag which Kinevane then experiments with, further transforming himself into Rudolph Valentino. In a review of *Silent* for *The New York Times*, Ben Brantley writes; “Mr. Kinevane turns into various Valentinos: exotic sheik (his

²⁸ *Irish Theatre in Transition*, 213.

²⁹ Culleton, Jim. (26th March 2019). Personal interview.

most famous screen incarnation); dominating Latin lover; and pliable, epicene tango dancer.”³⁰



Rudolph Valentino in *The Sheik*, 1921.³¹



Pat Kinevane as Rudolph Valentino in *Silent*.³²

The moment in which Kinevane transforms himself into *The Sheik* Rudolph Valentino happens in ‘BEYOND THE ROCKS’, where he takes out a piece of silver fabric from the black plastic bag. The garment is used to wrap around his head to look like Valentino in the film. Kinevane does this to demonstrate the beauty of Pearse and further emphasise the tragic element;

...he had it all going for him. That he had the looks of an international movie star. And yet, he was judged for that in his town and he was judged for that and his sexuality, so it made it even more tragic for me that somebody so beautiful could be wiped out by themselves.³³

³⁰ Brantley, Ben. “Acting It Out, Like Valentino”, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/10/theater/reviews/silent-by-pat-kinevane-at-irish-arts-center.html> [Accessed 29th April 2019].

³¹ The Everett Collection. *The Sheik, Rudolph Valentino, 1921*, fineartamerica.com <https://fineartamerica.com/featured/the-sheik-rudolph-valentino-1921-everett.html> [Accessed 29th April 2019].

³² Redmond, Patrick. *Production Shots*, [fishamble.com](http://www.fishamble.com) <http://www.fishamble.com/silent.html> [Accessed 29th April 2019].

³³ Kinevane, Pat. (27th March 2019). Telephone interview.

The black-and-white aesthetic of silent film creeps its way into the set design also – a bare stage scattered with props such as a white bowl, a grey cloth, a black garbage bag, two white bottles and a magazine. Similarly, Tino wears clothing of dark grey and white, with a black morning coat. His eyes are heavily lined with black. For each of the silent film sequences, Tino displays a sign with the title written on it in font recognisable of silent film.



Pat Kinevane in *Silent*.³⁴

Kinevane also said about the use of silent film, “I was always fascinated by that art form because it was so necessary. There was no way of recording sound. The only sound they could record or play alongside the silent movies was piano.” The piano music, which is also used in *Silent*, works in contrast with the sound effects from the street on which Tino sleeps. Specifically, the sound effect is a “coin sound”, as if a passer-by has dropped a coin into Tino’s begging cup. This sound effect brings the play from the past with the elaborate piano music, into the present, represented by the sound of a coin. Because of this, a kind of comparison is made between the almost idealistic tone of silent film and the starkness of reality.

Two predominant styles of dance are used in *Silent* are Flamenco and Ballroom. The styles of dance help to justify characterisation and create heightened moments in the piece.

³⁴ Redmond, Patrick. *Production Shots*, fishamble.com <http://www.fishamble.com/silent.html> [Accessed 29th April 2019].

In the final film, 'THE WONDERFUL CHANCE', which is also where Pearse succeeds in his suicide attempt by jumping in front of a train, Tino embodies Noelette Amberson. This character was mentioned at the beginning of the play as having reported Pearse after seeing him "kissin one of the sailors from the naval base" (*Forgotten/Silent*, 4). Tino tells the audience that this was the first proof people had of Pearse's homosexuality, resulting in "the start of the torture for Pearse" (*Forgotten/Silent*, 4). During 'THE WONDERFUL CHANCE', Noelette is coming home on the train from her Flamenco dancing classes in Cork city. The costume piece for this film is a feather garment, and Kinevane uses this to become Noelette along with the incorporation of Flamenco dance moves. Jim Culleton discusses the time they had studying Flamenco dance with a teacher in Dance Base in Edinburgh, and gives reasons as to why this dance is so powerful in the piece;

There are a small number of core moves in Flamenco dance, but they're all to do with sex and religion and death. There's one move where somebody would stretch out their arms, and she was saying if you're a woman then that's a gesture saying, 'come to me, embrace me, I love you', and if you're a man you're going 'I am Jesus Christ crucified on the cross, I am on the brink of death'. Every move is invested with huge passion and energy and elemental visceral energy.³⁵

At different points in the play, Tino dances with his blanket. At one stage it is a belly-dancing inspired movement, and in another it is ballroom dancing. Tino was a champion ballroom dancer with his ex-wife, Judy. One moment in the play depicts Tino reliving a memory dancing with Judy as he dances with the blanket in a ballroom style. Jim Culleton comments that while he is recalling this time with his ex-wife, "He's also at the same time a man dancing with a blanket, that people are probably crossing the road to avoid because he looks like he's unstable, or drunk."³⁶ In this sense, the play projects two images – one displays the

³⁵ Culleton, Jim. (26th March 2019). Personal interview.

³⁶ Culleton, Jim. (26th March 2019). Personal interview.

public prejudice surrounding homelessness, and another is a display of genuine skill and talent for dance. Thus, the play digs beneath the surface of appearances.

Through Kinevane's signature usage of audience interaction, Tino demands our attention.

With Tino interacting and talking with his audience, it further allows him the voice which he lacks in everyday life;

Early in his monologue Tino asks several audience members in the front row for their names. And throughout the show he will break from his narrative to call out those names. Are they there? Are they listening? Do they see him?³⁷

Another aspect of audience interaction which applies particularly to *Silent* is names. When Tino addresses someone in the audience, he asks for the person's name. Jim Culleton speaks about a moment in the play which demonstrates how names in the audience comes into effect. Tino "gets to know somebody and then he's disorientated at one point and he calls out for them and asks if they're still there, and it's the power of having someone's name, having a friend", says Culleton.

Sometimes in the audience that person says "yeah, I'm over here, Tino, I'm right here", and then the next little bit of the play goes one way and sometimes people get a bit uncomfortable about it and disturbed by that and they don't answer and then the next bit of the play goes a different way.³⁸

Silent works as a piece of theatre that reflects reality, both through the human characteristics and the subject material it engages with. Joan Fitzpatrick Dean in *Irish Theatre in Transition* describes the "extreme abjection" the characters face in the play as "distinctly human."³⁹ It shows the bleaker aspects of humanity with its moments of tragedy and engagement with dark material, but it also has contrasting moments of lightness and laughter, which evokes a wide range of reactions.

³⁷ Brantley, Ben. *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/10/theater/reviews/silent-by-pat-kinevane-at-irish-arts-center.html> [Accessed 29th April 2019].

³⁸ Culleton, Jim. (26th March 2019). Personal interview.

³⁹ *Irish Theatre in Transition*, 214.

The play also recognises how the central notion of silence impacts the situations in the play. It depicts the silence of homelessness through the information Tino gives us – at one stage in the play he describes a passer-by on the street who gave him a fifty euro note; “wouldn’t look at me, no contact.” (Forgotten/Silent, 9.) The silence surrounding death and suicide is shown through the reactions of those around him when Pearse died – “Oh the nuns would stab themselves if ya piped up about the human act of self-inflicted cessation.” (Forgotten/Silent, 11.) With the restrictions that come with the play’s incorporation of silence, physical expression becomes the only way left to communicate.

Conclusion

The theatrical fusions Kinevane incorporates in *Forgotten* and *Silent* marry themselves seamlessly with the problematic areas in society which are expressed in the plays. The theatre devices work to lift the subject matter and allows its significance in society to be expanded and heightened. An example of how it does this is the departure from reality with the inclusion of Kabuki inspired dance as transitional means between the elderly characters in *Forgotten*, and the black-and-white, silent cinematic approach to the treatment of Pearse's suicide attempts in *Silent*. In *Forgotten*, Kabuki works as a reminder to the audience of the values which are present in Japanese culture but missing in Irish culture regarding care for the elderly. Kabuki dance depicts the grace and dignified movement of a generation which would usually be associated with decrepit and deteriorating stature. The silent film theatricality in *Silent* raises the issue; particularly that of Pearse's death, to a point where the severity and tragedy of his suicide is highlighted. It does this in capturing the beauty and authenticity of who Pearse was and combining it with the injustice he faced. Thus, the different theatricalities of the two plays work to accentuate the issues drawn upon in both *Forgotten* and *Silent*.

Forgotten and *Silent* can be located at the intersection of several of the most distinctive trends in Irish drama in the twenty-first century, such as the blending of mime, dance and masking to create what Erika Fischer-Lichte calls 're-theatricalization' or the predominance of the monologue, especially as it embodies storytelling and explores gender as suggested by Patrick Lonergan (176-85).⁴⁰

In terms of how the similarities between Peter Brook's Rough Theatre and Kinevane's plays further push the societal issues, Rough Theatre is known to address "men's actions". It is also

⁴⁰ *Irish Theatre in Transition*, 214.

“down to earth and direct” because it “admits wickedness and laughter”⁴¹, relating to the humanistic nature and the humour which emerge from the darkest moments of *Forgotten* and *Silent*.

Furthermore, within the topic of the humour in the plays being a feature of Rough Theatre, Brook claims how it is there “to make joy and laughter, what Tyrone Guthrie calls ‘theatre of delight’, and any theatre that can truly give delight has earned its place. Along with serious, committed and probing work, there must be irresponsibility.”⁴² Particular moments in *Silent* for instance, with Tino’s playful attitude around serious topics such as mental health proves this. The play shows “committed and probing work” with how, for example, Tino addresses the audience directly about the use of anti-depressants, but the “irresponsibility” is also there in Tino’s personality, which grounds the character in a world that is recognisable and accessible. As stated by Lionel Pilkington in *Theatre and Ireland*, “Sometimes the stage Irishman is not just a character for an audience to laugh at but a device that makes us think again about what makes us laugh.”⁴³

Also relating to Rough Theatre is how Kinevane’s messages emerging from the issues in the plays are delivered, not only in how the pieces are performed, but also in the fact that he is known to defy elitism which exists in theatre. As stated in *Irish Theatre in Transition*;

Like many theatre productions that aggressively seek out touring opportunities, *Forgotten* and *Silent* challenge theatre elitism and cultivate non-traditional theatre audiences. Indeed, everything about these plays corroborates Kinevane’s description of himself as ‘working against elitism in theatre’⁴⁴.

While *Forgotten* and *Silent* have been performed in notable theatres such as the Abbey Theatre’s Peacock stage, they have also been performed in “community centres” and

⁴¹ *The Empty Space*, 80.

⁴² *The Empty Space*, 78.

⁴³ Pilkington, Lionel. *Theatre and Ireland* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 12.

⁴⁴ *Irish Theatre in Transition*, 206.

“appropriated spaces”⁴⁵, opening them up to alternative audiences who otherwise, might not have had the opportunity to see the plays. In this respect, Kinevane remains faithful to his ethics in voicing marginalized figures in modern society by equalizing the means by which his theatre is received.

Within the realm of contemporary Irish theatre, Kinevane’s plays establish a balance which both alludes to the verbal importance of the genre and simultaneously opposes it. Word-based plays by Irish playwrights such as Conor McPherson, Tom Murphy and Brian Friel relate somewhat to Kinevane’s work. At the same time, *Forgotten* and *Silent* are established as movement pieces, relating to physical theatre in plays by Enda Walsh and by theatre companies such as Corn Exchange, for example. The idea of the stylistic fusions of the plays is touched upon in *Irish Theatre in Transition*; “Performance-based pieces sometimes appear under the rubric ‘non-verbal theatre’, but the publication of Kinevane’s *Forgotten* and *Silent* reveals just how fully verbal the plays are.”⁴⁶

When asked about how they wanted the plays to translate to their audiences, Kinevane and Culleton expressed the importance of them conveying the message of the societal injustices related to homelessness and mental health in *Silent* and the lack of care and dignity associated with growing old in *Forgotten*. With that there is also the hope that the plays will provide entertainment and provoke laughter;

That’s what we hope- that Pat’s plays do that – that you feel you’ve seen the world through different eyes and that you’ve been entertained and you’ve enjoyed yourself, but it’s also made you think.⁴⁷

The fearless nature of Kinevane in relation to his theatrical explorations throughout *Forgotten* and *Silent* creates a mode of expression in unique ways, and sets out on their goal, which Culleton says is about “changing the world a tiny bit”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Irish Theatre in Transition*, 206.

⁴⁶ *Irish Theatre in Transition*, 209.

⁴⁷ Culleton, Jim. (26th March 2019). Personal interview.

⁴⁸ Culleton, Jim. (26th March 2019). Personal interview.

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